Home Care After Tonsillectomy or Adenoidectomy

Specific Instructions: After surgery, return to the office on _______________ at ______________ a.m./p.m.

Tonsillectomy is the removal of one or both tonsils from the throat. Adenoidectomy is the removal of the adenoids (located at the back of the nose in the throat). Both surgeries may be done together or separately.

General Information:
The patient may lack energy for several days, and may also be restless at night. This will improve over 3 to 4 days after adenoidectomy, and 5 to 14 days after a tonsillectomy. Recovery from an adenoidectomy is easier than recovery from a tonsillectomy. Constipation may occur during this time for three reasons: not eating a regular diet, taking pain medications, and being less active. Loss of weight is normal until regular eating habits resume.

Bleeding:
On the day of surgery, there should be little or no bleeding from the nose or mouth, other than some slightly blood-tinged mucous. If you see any bright red bleeding at all, sit the patient upright and phone your doctor immediately. Brown or dark red blood is “old blood” and does not indicate bleeding is currently happening. Between 5 and 10 days after surgery, the white or yellowish membrane (soft scab) breaks off in the back of the throat. A small amount of bloody mucous may be spit up. Have the patient rest, apply an ice collar, and give patient ice chips to suck on. If this continues after 20 to 30 minutes or is profuse, please call your doctor. If you are unable to reach your doctor quickly, please bring the patient into the emergency room (preferably at the hospital where the surgery was performed).

Diet:
The patient must drink plenty of fluids during the initial 14 day postoperative period. Offer a drink (at least 1 ounce) every hour he/she is awake. Offer favorite liquids such as popsicle, slush, pop and sherbert. Gatorade, Powerade and Pedialyte are highly recommended. Acid-based drinks, such as tomato and orange juice, and soda may be uncomfortable. Most people don’t feel like eating for several days. This is okay as long as the person drinks lots of fluids. Signs that the patient needs to drink more are when the urine is darker in color (urine should be pale yellow) or when a high fever (over 101° persists).

As appetite improves, solid foods and chewing should be strongly encouraged. There are no limits on the sort of foods the patient can eat. You cannot damage the throat by giving any particular type of food. Offer the patient his/her favorite foods. Salty foods encourage the patient to drink more. A dose of pain medication 30 to 40 minutes before eating may be beneficial.
Pain:
The throat and ear pain can be severe after a tonsillectomy. Give regular doses of pain medicine as your doctor suggests. Do not use aspirin products (like Aspirin or Pepto-bismol) for 2 weeks after surgery, because they thin the blood and may encourage bleeding. Chewing gum may be helpful in lessening muscle spasm. Acetaminophen products (Tylenol) may be repeated every 4 hours, but not more than 5 times a day.

Activity:
The patient should rest at home for the first 48 hours. Activity may increase as strength returns. Generally, people may return to school or work 7 to 10 days following a tonsillectomy and 2 to 3 days after an adenoidectomy. Patient should avoid swimming and vigorous activity for 14 days or until seen by the doctor. The patient may bathe and shampoo hair immediately, but do not use very hot water. Avoid long trips and plan to stay in the general area for 3 weeks after surgery.

Bad Breath:
Bad breath is very common due to the healing in the back of the throat. Drinking lots of fluids, swallowing frequently and chewing gum may improve the bad breath. Most people tend to breathe through the mouth and snore during the recovery period due to swelling. This may last up to 14 days and may be helped by propping up with pillows and using an ice collar (a few ice cubes wrapped in a plastic bag or towel). Using a humidifier at bedtime may lessen throat dryness caused by mouth breathing.

Fever:
It is normal for a patient to have a light fever (99° to 101° under the arm) for the first few days following a tonsillectomy. Drinking lots of fluids and taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) will help keep the fever down. If the fever is over 101.6°, contact your doctor.

Nausea/Vomiting:
It is not unusual for the patient to feel sick following a tonsillectomy, especially after the ride home. If vomiting persists into late evening, you may want to contact your doctor for a medication. If the patient is still vomiting the day after surgery, you need to notify your doctor. Also notify the doctor if the patient feels nauseous or vomits after taking pain medication or antibiotic.

If you need help:
Thank you for choosing us for you surgery. Following discharge home, if you have questions or concerns, please give us a call: 423/267-6738 for the nursing staff and 423/209-9110 for insurance and billing staff.